

[Kingdom Come]

[?]

Ruth Widen

625 E. 15 St.

New York, N. Y.

KINGDOM COME

By Ruth Widen

Mrs. Mary O'Shaughnessy lifted her round, unwieldy body out of the comfortable armchair and slowly pad-pad-padded across the kitchen floor to the windowbox full of growing flowers. She stood there, looking down at them, letting her stiff fingers ripple them a little like water, and mumbling to them. Her shape was bulgy before and behind, but pulled in about the waist by the corset she had always worn since she was a girl; and her face was like a wrinkled dried apple. In spite of her many years there was something babyish about her, so that you wanted to pick her up and dance her on your knee.

"That marrigold's goin' t'have annother blossom," she announced with slow, positive emphasis. "'T hasn't hadd a blossom since come Mickie Muss. Ann' th' zinnia, that's all over an' done with now. I'm goin' t'root it out t'morra."

She maneuvered her body halfway round to see if her husband was listening. He was sitting sprawled in the other armchair, his long legs making a thirty-degree angle in front of him. The newspaper he was reading was held up higher than his head. He was a mild, colorless man with a swish of gray mustache about his mouth.

Library of Congress

"Th' marrigold's goin' t'have annother blossom," said his wife, loudly, and in accordance with long habit he grunted, knowing that she would go on saying it until she got a reply.

"Y'never lissen t'me," said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. "Y'sit there comfortable like a sticka woodd, an' y'don't pay no 'tention t'me. I c'd 2 talk, an' talk, an'talk unntill Dooms Day, an' y'wuddent no more lissen t'me than t'th'winnd."

"If ye want I sh'd lissen t'ye," said James, "then ye sh'd say somethin' int'restin' an' new, like, here's a million dollars I been savin' up [for?] ye. Then ye'd see how I'd lissen!"

"Th'trouble is all th'things I say t'y' are too nice," his wife proclaimed. "I sh'd come an' say, I'm tired a-y' an' I'm goin' t'run away with annother mann. Then y'd lissen t'me, y'scutt y'! Y'd lissen t'me if I wuz t'say, I'm goin, t'run away with annother mann, all right. Y'd lissen t'me then, I'll warrant y'!"

She picked up a long whisk broom and absent-mindedly tried to brush under the radiator. Isolated phrases sounded now and then in a half-whisper, as if her lips kept up the argument after her mind had dropped it.

James gave up trying to read the newspaper and went into the front room and turned on the radio. It was a new kind of radio which played only music, never any advertising or announcers, except one announcer over [?] who had a deep, pleasing, romantic voice Mary O'Shaughnessy loved to hear. Its tones came faintly to her as she pattered around. She was being soothed back into an agreeable frame of mind. She eased herself back into the armchair and gradually settled down.

Her brother Henry came in, stomping in his great boots. She heard the clatter he always made hanging up his sheepskin coat in the hall. He came in with his red cheeks glowing from the out-of-doors. His black hair was only partly streaked with gray, and he towered

Library of Congress

over her like a 3 mischievous giant. She looked up at him; he always vaguely irritated her by seeming younger than he was.

“Ye'll have annother plate t'set f'r t'morra's breakfast, young woman,” he said, looking down at her. She stared.

“An' who'll it be?”

“An' ye'd better make up annother bed f'r tonight too,” he went on with maddening slowness.

“What d'y'mean, Henry?” She put a trembling hand on his rough sleeve. “Who's comin'?”

“Ye'll be havin' a guest t'night,” he said, spinning it out as long as he could. She began getting angry.

“Tell me! I'm askin' y', who's comin'? D'y'hear me, er not? Who's comin'?”

'Margery's comin',' he said at last, and watched the effect of his announcement. It had plenty. Mrs. O'Shaughnessy gasped, shifted her eyes away and then back to his, and the cords in her throat moved convulsively.

“Marr-gery!” she enunciated thickly. “Marrgery's comin' back?”

He hesitated a bare second. “Yes,” he said. “Margery's comin' . . . back. She'll be here anny minnit now.”

With considerable effort Mrs. O'Shaughnessy pulled herself together. “Wull . . . wull . . . wull then I've gott t'fix her room f'r'r,” she said, as one who thinks up an unheard-of new idea.

“What I've been tellin' Y' f'r the past half hour,” said her brother dryly.

Library of Congress

He watched her until she had clambered up to the top of the stairs 4 and then, without hurry, went back through the front hall, back past the coat-rack where his sheepskin coat was hanging, and opened the front door of the house to a pleasant young woman who was waiting outside.

“Did you tell yer?” Margery asked, hesitating. He nodded.

“I preparred 'er.” He held the door open. “C'monin an' take off yer things.”

“Where is she?” Margery hung her coat and hat beside his and fluffed her hair before the hall mirror.

“Upstairs, fixin' y'r room. She'll be down in a minnit. Here's y'r father inside.”

“It's a wonder he wouldn't come to meet me, after five years,” said Margery. She walked into the living room and her father rose awkwardly and came forward. “I'd a come out t' meet ye, but there's a fine program on I wuz lissnin' ta.”

“Same old Dad,” said his daughter,

“How'd ya leave 'em all?”

Margery's face clouded. “I sure hated to break away, and leave John with those three kids. . . . I've had two, you know, since you were . . . with us.” She phrased this last delicately, as if afraid of wounding him.

“Well, how do you like the old house?” Henry broke in, genially. “It's just like it was.” He waved his hand around the room.

“Oh we've changed it a lot in the meantime,” said Margery. She looked around and picked out one piece of furniture to bear the weight of her disapproval. “We throw out that old desk since you went away.”

Library of Congress

James O'Shaughnessy looked inexpressibly pained. The desk, as she 5 pointed to it, became faint and shadowy; its outlines wavered and it seemed on the point of dissolving into thin air. "No!" he said. "Y'dident throw it out, really, Margery? That wuz a good desk." The dissolving process was checked. "Y'r mother an' I got that f'r a weddin' present," he went on more boldly. "Her uncle Luke's wife in Buffalo give it t'us, an' she had th'money annyway t'buy somethin' good. Feel of that Margery — it's good mahogany, it is!" He placed his hand on the desk, which became solid and opaque again, like the rest of the room.

"It's so out of date," said Margery. "Everybody has walnut now."

"Th' whole house is out of date," her uncle broke in, "but she come back t'it, didn't ye?" He grinned. He and Margery had always understood each other.

"Whyn't ye come before?" James asked, reproachfully.

"I wasn't coming at all," she answered quietly. "I'd made up my mind, "I'll never got back into that old coop again. But then I found out I had a yen for it, somehow. Everything else here is so . . . strange," and she shivered a little and the tips of her fingers crept out as if to touch something in the familiar old house.

Her father cleared his throat. "There's one thing I want t'warn ye about, Margery, before y'see y'r mother. She don't know what's happened, see?"

The girl stared at him, round-eyed.

" Doesn't . . . know! "

"She don't know," said her Uncle Henry.

"We never told her," said James O'Shaughnessy.

“But how could she help knowing?”

“Well, it all took place so gradual like, an' th' end wuz so peaceful, 'twasn't really like annything much at all.”

“Even so!” his daughter said.

“So y'better be careful what y'say t'her, because a shock upsets her so.” He rubbed his hands together nervously.

Margery stood very straight and the lines of her face hardened. “If she doesn't know it yet, it's time she did.”

If I wuz you . . .”

Henry grinned, “I'm tellin' ye, Margery, th'house won't be fit t'live in f'r a week.”

“But she's got to know some time,” said Margery.

“I wish . . .” her father protested.

“ [Marr-gery?] !”

Mrs. O'Shaughnessy's tremulous contralto echoed through the house. Though not especially loud there was something compelling about it, something that would make a man in a coma sit up and take notice.

Margery drew a long breath. “Gee, do you remember how she used to wake me up every morning just that way? [Marr-gery!] ”

Library of Congress

The parlor door opened and Mary's form trundled over the threshold. Margery sprang forward. She took her mother's pulpy hands in her own and met the questioning, reproachful gaze. She couldn't speak.

"Ye've come back, Marr-gery," said Mrs. O'Shaughnessy. It was an accusation. The girl straightened up and cleared her throat. There was a long half-minute in which nobody said anything. Then she spoke. 7 "No Ma, I haven't came back. I haven't been away."

James O'Shaughnessy moved restlessly about the room. Henry slipped out discreetly and was heard disposing his big body in one of the arm-chairs in the kitchen.

"What d'y mean?" The old woman's troubled eyes stared into her dauthter's. "Sure Y've been away. Y've not been here in five years. Why d'y 'go away, Marrgery?"

"You went away," said Margery firmly. Her father's hands twitched.

"I been here right along, Marrgery," her mother protested. "I never left here."

Her daughter looked at her, full of compassion, and spoke slowly and carefully, as when one explains a now idea to a small child. "You died five years ago, Ma. Don't you remember?"

"T anny rate, I wuddent use just that word," James muttered in a last futile protest.

Mary O'Shaughnessy's eyes grew ver round. Her lips moved soundlessly. The cords in her throat throbbed like some helpless wild creature caught in a trap. "D-died?" she whispered. She evidently didn't believe it.

"It was the week after Christmas, when Junior was only six months old," said Margery relentlessly. "Don't you remember how sick you were?"

Library of Congress

"Yes I wuz verry sick. Mary said, caching at a straw. "I remember. I wuz verry sick. But I gott better, Marrgery, an' then you'd gone away."

8

"And Dad was here."

"Yes, James Wuz here with me, and you wuz gone."

"He died just three months before you did," Margery explained. "Don't you remember the funeral?"

"Yes, I remember the fun'l." The old woman seemed to be on surer ground now. "They wuz eleven wreaths of flowers. It was a grand fun'l. But when I got well, he'd come back an' you'd gone away."

[Yell?], and didn't somebody come to you and explain how things are?"

"Wh-whut d'y 'mean?"

"When [I?] passed out, that is when I came to again," said Margery, "the first thing I saw was a big tall man standing by my side, with a light around him like, and he told me not to be afraid and gave me a long talk about how to get along and what to do. Otherwise I'd of been scared out of my shirt. Didn't [you?] see somebody like that?"

"Oh ann' I didd," Mary recalled. "Ann' I saw a big tall mann too, an, he wuz telling me some long rigmarole 'r other. But I didn't pay him no mind."

James cleared his throat. From where he stood, behind the big rocker, his voice came remotely, impersonally. "She chased 'im outa th' house," he said, addressing the mantelpiece with the radio on it.

Library of Congress

'Wha-at?' shouted Margery incredulously. Mary's face suddenly broke into millions of delighted wrinkles at the memory. "Ann' I chased 'im outta th' house too," she whispered gutturally, chuckling. She dug Margery in the ribs to make her see the joke. "Sure ann' I thought he wuz th' tax mann. I said to'm, get outta this house, I said. Y've no 9 right here, I said to'm, I had my daughter (that wuz Catherine y'know, Margery) I had my grown daughter go down t'th'office Monday, I said, an' she tuk care of't f'r me an' y've no business here, I said. Botherin' around a poor widda woman that's harrdly got up outa bed. Get outta this house, I said, 'r I'll take the broom t'y'. Oh, he went quick, I'll tell y'. He went away quick, Margery. He musta been scairrta me."

"Well I never saw the like!" cried the younger woman, breaking into discordant laughter. "Ma, you're a riot."

Old Mary looked around triumphantly, swaying a little. Her eyes fell successively on the hangings in the door to the kitchen, on the wall, on the mantel, on the big rocker, on her husband trying to be unobtrusive behind the big rocker. There they rested. Their owner stopped swaying and seemed to grow larger in size.

"Ja-a-ames!" she enunciated thickly.

She got over to her husband's side and stood there heavily, breathing fire. "So y'wuddent tell me," she proclaimed bitterly and slowly. "An' here I've been dead five years an y'wuddent tell me nuthin' about't. Y'sit around an' y'sit around here all th'livelong day like the blessed stachue of I-don't-know-whatt, an' y'never tell me a livin', breathing thing."

James regarded her blandly, though he couldn't avoid sucking hard on his cigar. "For sure Mary alanna," he said pacifically, "an' ye never asked me itself."

Library of Congress

His wife glared at him steadily. "I've been a good wife t'you, James O'Shaughnessy," she announced. "It's a good wife I've been t'y' these 10 thirrtty five years, an' there's no mother's son c'd say I haven't. . ."

James, glancing at Margery, saw no help forthcoming and settled himself resignedly in the big rocking chair while the storm beat about his ears for half an hour.

"Scutt!" Mary finished contemptuously. "It's not annother mann, it's a man I shud have found, t'begin with. A man that'd be a mann."

She began to toddle absent-mindedly around the room. From time to time her lips moved and dropped whispers, as if unconsciously. "Diedd!" "Deadd!"

Then suddenly she straightened up, "Ye've had nuthin, t'eat yet," she accused Margery. "Come inta th'kitchen an' let me feed y'."

"Spice cakes?" her daughter asked, brightening.

The old woman's face fell into delighted wrinkles. "Ye-es, I've got plenty a spice cakes f'r y', an' we'll all have a cuppa coffee t'gothor." She bustled out into the kitchen.

The others waited until the smell of percolating coffee crept invitingly between the hangings, and until they heard Henry call, "C'monin, the'grub's waitin'! Then, slowly and with dignity, as if tearing themselves reluctantly away, they sauntered into the kitchen.

"Now sitt down," said Mary authoritatively, looking from one face to another, and having to look up at each one. "Now sitt down, every last one of y', an' eatt, before I take a stick t'y'."

"Sit down yourself ma," said Margery presently. "We're all eating but you. Sit down."

W'd ought t'gett a new sett of salt shakers," the old lady murmured 12 as she got into her chair by inches.

Library of Congress

"Here, have some of your own cake. You didn't forget how to make it I see."

Mrs. O'Shaughnessy smiled raptly, but absent-mindedly. "D'y'like it? Take some more, Marrgery. Help y'self t'some more cake."

'F annything she makes 'em bettern she did before," said Henry, taking another.

"Didd I have a good fun'!" Mary burst forth suddenly leaning forward. "Wuz there many wreaths of flowers, Marrgery?"

"Grand funeral!" said Margery with her mouth full. "Uncle Henry was there. You remember it, Uncle Henry. Wasn't it a grand funeral?"

"They wuz eighteen wreaths an' two other pieces," Henry nodded slowly. I counted 'em my own self.

"Biggest funeral they'd had in the church in ten years," Margery supplemented.

Mary's eyes began to shine, and a deep sigh of pleasure noticeably swelled her ample bosom.

"Who wuz at th' fun'!? tell me!" she commanded. "Wuz the' Maginnises there? . . ."

For two hours they told her about the funeral. She grew more and more excited and happy all the time, somehow getting to look absurdly like a young [girl?] planning the details of her first party. She wanted to know about the candles, and the shroud, and the casket, and the hearse, and the horses, and the funeral oration, and hundreds of other things. Her daughter and her brother did the best they could with their five-year-old 12 memories, and when those failed, began making up more to satisfy her. James sipped his coffee, smoked his cigar and said nothing, like the meek abstracted little man that he was. When

Library of Congress

the kitchen clock struck eleven-thirty Mary roused herself. "It's time y'wuz goin' t'bedd," she said accusingly. "I've gott y'r room all made up f'r y'."

"I'll help you wash the dishes." Margery began picking up the cups and saucers. The men rose, and began strolling away, talking. Margery took the dish-towel and dried the cups, polishing them carefully, as her mother washed.

"Good night Margery," called Henry at the foot of the stairs. "See y' in th'mornin'."

"Ja-a-ames!" came Mary's voice in a tired cracked rumble. "See that all th'lights is put out, James, all through th'house."

"Any more to do?" Margery put up the dish towel. "Ah leave all that, Ma, and come upstairs."

"You go on up, Margery. Leave me now an' go on up t'bedd."

"All right, goo'night," Margery yawned, and dropped a kiss on her mother's forehead.

Mrs. O'Shaughnessy puttered around the kitchen another half hour before she went up stairs.

Before sliding into bed beside her snoring husband, Mary O'Shaughnessy tiptoed to the window in her bare feet and looked out at the moonlight touching the back yards with dramatic mystery. Her lips moved. She looked and looked. It was almost too beautiful to turn away from. Standing 13 there, looking at the back yards and the moonlight, she did something she'd never done in her life before. She made a philosophical generalization.

"It don't make such a nawful diff'rence, bein' deadd," she said slowly and positively, as if someone were there to dispute it. "I don't see why they make th'fuss they do about't."